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Thesis

THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF
EMILY DICKINSON'S VERSE

by

JOSEPH PAUL LOVERING

A. B., HOLY CROSS COLLEGE, 1943

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

1948

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J. M. DICKINSON'S WORK

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Approved by

First Reader Winslow H. Loveland

Professor of English

Second Reader Lang H. White

Professor of English

Approved by

First Reader Wm. H. H. H.

Professor of English

Second Reader Wm. H. H.

Professor of English

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"London Laboratory"
"Nesbitt, Richardson & Co."

Horace

CHOCOLATE

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INTRODUCTION

The greatest mystery surrounding Emily Dickinson is not that of her very secretive existence in the old Dickinson Road in old Amherst. Nor is it still more the question of her lover which continues to perplex her biographers and critics. Rather it is the poetry of the woman herself that causes the literati the greatest astonishment and wonder.

For here is a poet writing a living vibrant verse in a style which was a good one hundred years ahead of her poetic "time", yet whose thought content is universally true.

Miss Bremer says with PART ONE her criticism of Emily Dickinson, "The THREE CARDINAL VIRTUES could never explain Emily Dickinson." Her epigrammatic "Booby of Melody", as the Misses Todd and Ringham have recently called them, transcends our concepts of space and time and seems to ring eternally true.

Not only was the Amherst recluse's thinking far ahead of her poetic period and surroundings but perhaps even more startling is the style in which she versed her pungent and delightful thoughts. Their freshness, their sparkling clarity, their absolute dearth of old-time poetic clichés--these should constitute the major concern of our critics of Miss Dickinson.

1 Twelve American Poets Before 1900. Author, Miss Bremer. Pg. 267

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Rica Brenner says with truth in her criticism of Emily Dickinson, "The accidents of time and space could never explain Emily Dickinson." ¹ Her epigrammatic "Bolts of Melody", as the Misses Todd and Bingham have recently called them, transcend our concepts of space and time and seem to ring eternally true.

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¹ Twelve American Poets Before 1900. Author, Rica Brenner. Pg. 269

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I have tried to examine the poetry of Emily Dickinson from the viewpoint of religious poetry, because I believe that she was essentially a religious poet in the broader sense of that word. An overwhelming number of her small poems search and define that bond which bound her to her Creator.

I have examined her poetry on the cardinal Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Love and also on the principles of asceticism and mysticism - i.e., resignation, humility, detachment, renunciation, and prayer.

It is on these grounds that I firmly believe that she ranks as one of America's leading religious poets.

She was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, December 10, 1830, the daughter of Edward Dickinson and Emily Norcross.

Since no person is entirely free from the influence of heredity and environment, it is well to keep in mind a few of the family characteristics.

Emily's father was a Yale graduate and was the product of a traditional New England background. He was actively interested in cultural and political pursuits both in Amherst and in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Personally he was considered austere, uncommunicative and coldly correct, but a very efficient public servant.

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CHAPTER I

A Brief Biography

"Facts are for everybody. They are impersonal; interpretation is, and cannot escape being, a one-man view. It is attractive, far more than the purely impersonal, objective delineation; but it is always risky." 2

I shall begin my essay on Miss Emily Dickinson by giving a brief biography and sticking to the skeleton facts concerning her life and omitting any controversial detail regarding those phases of her life on which her biographers are at variance.

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2 Creative Reading, Vol. V No. 1 Pg. 447. Aug. 1930
Author Richard Burten. Pub. College House, Harvard Sq.,
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Emily Norcross, or Mrs. Edward Dickinson, was a hard-working mother who was always said to keep a neat household but who never had the intellectual capacities to share in the life of her husband or her genius daughter.

In matters religious Edward Dickinson was a Congregationalist, who, although he insisted on church attendance from his family, had never been considered a devout man in the Amherst parish. He fulfilled several roles as administrator for his church but could not be said to have been a "pillar of the Church".

Her mother also was a steady church-goer but one whose faith Emily has characterized as that of a person who just knows that God will hold off the rain long enough to let the Amherst farmers get in their crops of hay.

Emily lived a perfectly normal life in the rather well-to-do Dickinson family circle in her childhood and in her teens. Edward Dickinson was conscious of the benefits of a good education and provided young Emily with plenty of books to cultivate her intellect. She attended Amherst Academy and entered into the spirit of school activities and seemed to enjoy the process of learning.

In the fall of 1847, Emily went to Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts. One year at this institution was sufficient for her. She rather seemed to enjoy her scholastic pursuits and also some of her new-found friends, but the rigorous grind at South Hadley, which was

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designed to fit young girls for missionary duty in any land on ten days' notice, was too abrupt a change from the security of her Amherst routine.

She continued to study at home under an understanding friend, Mr. Humphrey, a tutor at Amherst. He lent her many books and supervised her study in a very sympathetic manner until his untimely death in November of 1850. Emily mourned him very much and knew years afterward that his death was a real tragedy in her life. During these years, from her leaving Holyoke Female Seminary until the fall of 1852, Emily Dickinson continued to lead a very normal social life in her community. It is true that she never was a conformist to the orthodox God of New England religion. Her thinking was more akin to Transcendentalism and more especially that of Ralph Waldo Emerson. But she did, for the most part, lead a life of outward conformity to the Amherst social structure in her youth.

The years from 1852 to 1854 are where conjecture creeps into the picture of Emily Dickinson's life.

Edward Dickinson was elected to Congress from Massachusetts. Emily accompanied him to Washington and also visited in Philadelphia. In her biographers' accounts of this period there is a sharp division over whom Emily fell in love with. There is no denial of the fact of her romance during this period. There is much contradiction on who the man was. All attempts to uncover real evidence of this period have ended in confusion and conjecture.

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Miss Josephine Pollitt builds a case that Emily's lover was the husband of her very good friend Helen Hunt Jackson. Miss Genevieve Taggard says that the suitor was George Gould, the Amherst graduate and clergyman. Both of these contentions are admittedly inconclusive.

After this interlude the thread of Emily's career picks up with her return to Amherst where she lived the life of a recluse, having only a few intimate friends and spending her time in reading and writing poetry, and keeping the Dickinson household with her mother and her sister Lavinia.

Richard Burten has something very important to say regarding the attempts to uncover more about Miss Emily Dickinson's private life. I fully concur with him when he says, "It is interesting and not unimportant to inquire whether Emily Dickinson has been misrepresented by those close to her; to try to explain the transition from a gay, socially zestful girl to the peculiar recluse of popular belief, suppressed by circumstances from the full expression of her being. But the ultimate and most important thing is to realize and appreciate the sort of poetry she wrote and what her place is among our singers, in due order of gift accomplishment, regardless of her background of education, environment or home influence." 3

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This point, I believe, has not been sufficiently stressed in the discussion of Miss Dickinson's poetry.

Emily Dickinson died of Bright's disease May 15, 1886, in her fifty-sixth year, leaving behind for the world the infinite treasure of her verse, the greater part of which did not reach publication until 1945.

Or cool her pain,

Or help the fainting brain

With his rest again,

I shall not live in vain." 4

Emily's love for nature, animals and humans, for her fellow beings and for her Creator is as profound as her imagination.

Charity began at home for Emily Dickinson. She loved her father with a devotion that surmounted any differences in their theologies. She was devoted to her mother although the sources of their feelings and thoughts were as different as the night and day. She lived in perfect peace and harmony with her sister Lavinia, who also did not share her poetic interests.

This filial love is shown most readily in her letters which have been collected and edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi, the poet's niece. In them are shown the heart that quivered when any of her beloved ones experienced any discomfort or sorrow or grief.

4 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, Pg. 6. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

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CHAPTER II

Her Love

"If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his rest again,
I shall not live in vain." 4

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CHAPTER II

Her Lover

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an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Albright.

The close of this letter to her brother Austin who was in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for the winter is typical of the fervor of the love that went into her letters to all her loved ones: "I wish I could imbue you with all the strength and courage which can be given men—I wish I could assure you of the constant remembrance of those you leave at home—I wish—but oh! how vainly—that I could bring you back again and never more to stray. You are tired now, dear Austin, with my incessant din, but I can't help saying any of these things." 5

This excerpt is from a letter and is classified as prose, but its emotional intensity can be pointed out to show Emily's devotion to her brother, a devotion that rivals that of her favorite, Currer Bell, for her wayward brother, Branwell Brontë.

When her brother married, his "Sue" was considered and loved by Emily with as much regard as if she were a natural kin.

For Emily Life meant Love, and Love meant Calvary. She said so many different times in many beautiful ways.

"I'll tell you how I tried to keep the streets to when she gave A smile to show you when, this deep

All waded, we look back for play

5 Bolts of Melody New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 168.

5 The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 171
Author Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

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"I'll tell you how I tried to keep
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At those old times in Calvary." 6
 Or,
 "No service hast thou I would not achieve it,
 To die or live,
 The first, sweet, proved I ere I saw thee.
 For life means love!" 7

It is evident in reading her poetry that she gave up or sacrificed the one man in her life that she felt she could give herself to completely. Her sacrifice was made. We don't know exactly under what circumstances but we may infer it was a bond that was unbreakable here on earth or Emily's love would have transcended it.

Later in her life she came to know more and more that although Life was Love, it did not end with Life, and that complete Love came with Immortality.

She realized that love was intended for all of God's children, and not merely those who were her acquaintances. The residents of Amherst have handed down the stories of her generosity to the little ones who might be perhaps returning from the day at school. "This dirty little heart is freely mine," she wrote of a little stranger of the streets to whom she gave a doughnut.

6 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 165. Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

7 Ibid., Page 166

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8 Poems of Emily, New Poems of Emily, Jackson, N.Y. 1882.
Ed. by Isabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

She writes concerning love for one's neighbor in a vein that echoes Edwin Arlington Robinson's "James Wetherwell".

Emily says:

"The height of our portentous neighbor

We never know

Till summoned to his recognition

By an adieu." 8

Yet her love for the others of God's creation—the beauty of flowers, the Amherst hills and countryside, the love for the smallest of insects and that for her dog, Carlo, was no less intensive than for her fellow man.

Her oft anthologised poem "A Narrow Fellow In the Grass" is a good example. In it she says characteristically:

"Several of nature's people

I know, and they know me;

I feel for them a transport

Of cordiality;" 9

Her "friends" in nature numbered every bird and bee that summer brought to beautiful Amherst lawn with its high cedar hedges that gave her seclusion as she walked with Carlo and tended her flowers.

She often remarked in her letters when asked who her companions were, that Carlo, her dog, was her best companion

8 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 257. Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

9 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Pg. 91

She writes concerning love for one's neighbor in a vein that echoes John Milton's "Lycidas":

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"The height of our glorious neighbor

We never know

Will ascend to his recognition

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8 Ballad of Melody, New Poems of Emily Dickinson, Pg. 284.
Ed. by Ralph Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

9 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Pg. 81.

because he understood about things and yet didn't disturb anyone by uttering inanities.

Even the smallest and most insignificant of nature's creatures, which are often looked upon by many poets and non-poets alike with disdain, all came in for their share of grandeur in Emily's conception of them. Her scope of love reminds one of the all-engulfing love of Walt Whitman for the things of life. Even the worm, "pink, lank, and warm", and the spider, "neglected son of genius", she takes poetically by the hand.

Much of the criticism of Miss Dickinson has so heavily concentrated on the romantic love interest in her life and its dramatic unfulfillment that sometimes the reader gets the impression that this was the only significant thing about Emily's life and that it is the real clue to the understanding and evaluation of her poetry. I believe that induction is inconclusive and misleading.

It is undeniably true that her poetry to a large degree is shadowed by the loss of the one true love that came her way. But that does not mean that Emily therefore developed a neurosis which destroyed her outlook on life and her poetical thinking. No, there are far too many other poems that show her as the calm, philosophical mystic who had extremely clear views of the meaning of life. It is more logical to hold that Emily Dickinson, even upon giving up her lover, did so knowing that it was a necessary sacrifice to

because he understood about things and yet didn't distrust anyone by ordering himself.

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be made in order that others' lives and love might not be injured.

She came to learn that the ultimate in love meant sacrifice here upon earth in order to gain perfect love and happiness in the hereafter, which she calls a "fleshless love in heaven".

She said:

"The love a life can show
Below,
Is but a filament, I know,
Of that diviner thing
That faints upon the face
Of noon
And smites the tinder in
The sun,
And hinders Gabriel's wing." 10

Also,

"Love is that later thing than death,
More previous than life,
Confirms it at its entrance and
Usurps it of itself;
Tastes death, the first to prove the sting
The second, to its friend,

10 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 147. Withheld from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and Alfred Lette Hampson.

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Also,

"Love is that later thing than death,

More precious than life,

Confirms it at its entrance and

Urges it of itself;

Tastes death, the first to prove the thing

The second, to its friend,

IO Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pp. 147. Withheld from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and Alfred Latta Hanson.

Disarms the little interval,
 Deposits him with God.
 Then hovers, an inferior guard,
 Lest this beloved charge
 Need, once in eternity,
 A lesser than the large." 11

These poems show that Emily Dickinson's views on love were decidedly Christian to an eminent degree. She did not find this love in the village church in Amherst. She found it almost in spite of the Calvinistic sternness of her times. She found it first of all in her quiet surroundings, her friends, her lost lover. And finally she found it in her Creator Who gave her all of these other loves.

She is often compared with Walt Whitman in the depth and scope of her love. She has been called the epigrammatic Walt Whitman. Emily tells us: "You speak of Mr. Whitman. I have never read his book, but was told it was disgraceful."¹² She further explains why she perhaps did not come into contact with The Leaves of Grass: "Father buys me many books, but begs me not to read them, because he fears they joggle my mind."

If Emily had read Walt Whitman she would have found there truly a love of mankind and nature fully as wide in

11 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 284 Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

12 The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 239 Author Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

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Then however, an inferior guard,

Leaves this beloved charge

Need, once in eternity,

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12 The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 232
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scope as that of her own but one that would not have matched her own either in beauty or in understanding.

Walt Whitman tasted and felt life and death fully, but Emily Dickinson not only was familiar with these but also tasted Immortality.

The father of free verse thought in a vein that was anthropocentric. Emily's outlook was Theocentric. Her mind was more constantly associated with Almighty God, and she is therefore more of a religious poet.

Whitman described the things around him as beautiful in themselves. Emily Dickinson saw their beauty truly to be the reflected glory of their Maker. Although she looked upon the earth and its treasure as her "Eden", she nevertheless always directed her love toward things eternal. She understood the parable of the Good Samaritan.

"To offer brave assistance
To lives that stand alone
When one has failed to stop them
Is human, - but divine
To lend an ample sinew
Unto a nameless man
Whose homely benediction
No other cared to earn." 13

13 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 27. Withheld from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and Alfred Lette Hampson.

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CHAPTER III

Her Hope

The Christian virtue which Emily Dickinson developed and practiced most was that of confidence in her Creator. Although she consistently referred to her earthly existence as living in "Eden", nevertheless, just as consistently does she look forward to the perfect fulfillment of her desires in the exciting world to come after death. A majority of her poems testify to this assertion.

From the story of her life, even omitting the details which are controversial, it is known that she wanted to give her life and love to the man she fell in love with but could not marry. She considered this person to be the only one with whom she could be completely in love with and yet she could not marry. Therefore, it seems altogether natural that her thinking and her poetry should show this shadow of her life to a marked degree.

It is altogether misleading, of course, to suppose that this misfortune dominated her entire life or poetry. It is equally as wrong to suggest, by dwelling on this one phase of her life, that it contains the whole secret of the understanding of her poetry.

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Emily Dickinson looked for the fulfillment of her being in the life to come with more than the hope of meeting her earthly lover in after life or simply the finding of

solace from her earthly existence. She viewed with happy hope the approach of her departure from this life as the natural reward of one who has lived a life of seeking the truth, not as a frustrated soul who longs for an end of suffering.

Her poetry shows a calm confidence that her Maker will shower on her the treasures that she feels will be hers.

Quite naturally Emily's life was not one of complete serenity. She had many crosses to bear besides that of her voluntary giving up of her lover. She bore her family burdens well, which included often a deference to her strict father's wishes, and the communal living with those in her family who did not show any interest in her almost completely spiritual life. Yet she lived from day to day with a strengthening of her hopes for Immortality by watching the manifestations of God in His universe.

She said of her ever-deepening horizon of hope:

"I could not prove the years had feet,

Yet confident they run

Am I from symptoms that are past

And series that are done.

I find my feet have further goals,

I smile upon the aims

That felt so ample yesterday—

Today's have vaster claims.

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She said of her ever-deepening horizon of hope:

"I could not grope the years had lost,

Yet confident they run

Am I from symptoms that are past

And earlier that are done.

I find my feet have further goals,

I smile upon the time

That felt so empty yesterday—

Today's have vaster claims.

I do not doubt the self I was
Was competent to me;
But something awkward in the fit
Proves that outgrown, I see." 14

Like everybody, Emily had moments when it seemed as if she could wait no longer for the fulfillment of her innermost desires, but these moments were crowded by many more positive moments of keen anticipation of the hereafter. She was feeling the burden heavily most likely when she wrote the following lines delightful, even in their pleading quality:

".....
Where tired children placid sleep
Through centuries of noon—
This place is bliss, this town is heaven!
Please, Pater, pretty soon!" 15

It is such lines as these that Henrick Van Loon had in mind when he said, "Emily Dickinson's relations toward her God were rather particular. They included the right to ask whatever embarrassing questions she meant to put up to Him, and if the Good Lord did not come forward with a prompt and satisfactory reply, she herself meant to supply it". 16

14 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson, Pg. 117
Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

15 Ibid., Page 118

16 Van Loon's Lives. Pg. 70. Author Henrick William Van Loon.

I do not doubt the still I was

was content to rest;

But something answered in the air

Proves that outward, I see, is

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she could wait no longer for the fulfillment of her inner-

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There lived children placed asleep

Through centuries of noon—

This place is bliss, this town is heaven!

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Ed. by Ralph Loomis and Millicent Todd Bingham.

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Emily argues poetically in another little verse that her plight is not so bad. She recalls how St. Paul was imprisoned in Rome and things looked pretty hopeless for him. But she remembers how conveniently the Lord took care of him and infers that He could do the very same for her.

"The staple must be optional
That an immortal binds." 17

Similarly the concept of death does not shatter her hope. She wrote of it on many occasions, but nearly always as the transition to a better place.

"By death's bold exhibition
Preciser what we are
And the eternal function
Enabled to infer." 18

The "uncertain certainty" was eagerly anticipated in her later years that she might know the eternal secrets.

Her deep spirituality had arrived even at another paradoxical concept, that service to God without hope was the tenderest of human acts, since it inspired all the zeal without any of the selfishness of men.

Although Emily Dickinson lived on very intimate terms with Divine Providence and spoke with Him on many occasions with a charming frankness, nevertheless she was never pre-

17 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 120.
Ed. by Mabel Toomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

18 Ibid., Page 208

sumptuous of His love and trust. Their relationship is brought out clearly in some of her letters. For example she wrote very quaintly as a young girl the following statement which is also characteristic of her entire philosophy of hope: "I have perfect confidence in God and His promises—and yet I know not why, I feel the world has a predominant place in my affections." 19

Later in November of the year 1882, shortly after her Mother's death, she wrote: "I believe we shall in some manner be cherished by our Maker—that the One who gave us this remarkable earth has the power still farther to surprise that which He has caused." 20

Yet Emily did not think presumptuously of our rewards to come. Witness her beautiful thoughts on the circumstances of the forgiving of the good thief at Golgotha. Calvary was one of her favorite themes.

She sings:

"Remember me," implored the Thief—
Oh magnanimity!

"My Visitor in Paradise
I give thee Guaranty."

That courtesy will fair remain,

When the delight is dust,

19 The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 19
Author Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

20 Ibid., Page 345

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That courtesy will fair remain,

When the delight is past,

With which we cite this mightiest case
Of compensated Trust.

Of All, we are allowed to hope,
But Affidavit stands

That this was due, where some, we fear,
Are unexpected friends." 21

Emily, furthermore, had mastered the psychology of hope as her later poems revealed. She tells us that many times she had thought that a serenity had at last come upon her, only to realize that it was just another "fictitious shore" before the final harbor. She called Hope a "subtle glutton" that fed upon the fair. Yet she affirms that, upon closer inspection we find that "whatsoever is consumed, the same amount remains".

She held with Christian tradition that the only unpardonable sin was that against hope itself.

".....

Remorse is cureless,—the disease

Not even God can heal;

For it is His institution,—

The complement of hell." 22

21 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Pg. 296

22 Ibid., Page 39

With which we also might least care

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21 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Pp. 232

Finally she saw with Francis Thompson that:

"Retreat was out of hope,—

Behind, a sealed route,

Eternity's white flag before,

And God at every gate." 23

She had learned that to hope and trust faithfully in her Creator meant final victory.

"Land, ho! Eternity!

Ashore at last!" 24

23 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 214. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

24 Ibid., Page 253

CHAPTER IV

Her Faith

Emily Dickinson's belief in an omnipotent Creator who had fashioned her out of clay and had destined her for immortality was a lively, vigorous, and steadfast faith.

It was remarkably free from the sternness and austerity of her religious background in old Amherst. It resembled more that of the militant variety that characterized the Apostle Paul.

The epigrammatic singer sang of faith that surpassed understanding. She credited the Lord for having placed her in this "Eden", but she was only waiting, sometimes patiently and a few times peevishly, for the call to immortality.

Emily Dickinson believed in a God that was omnipresent in this world and yet whose real kingdom existed in the life to come. He was certainly a very personal God to her and she lived on most intimate terms with Him—, as intimate as any saint on the Christian calendar. That is why she felt as though she could converse with Him so frankly and so freely.

Her faith grew in intensity and clarity as she approached the goal of her earthly existence. In her poetry there are some of the most forthright and positively brilliant affirmations of faith that the language knows.

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Much that has been written about this poet has said that her poetry will always remain not fully understood until the complete facts of her life have been revealed. This criticism seems to me inadequate. Certainly Emily Dickinson has told us with all the sparkling clarity and brilliant forcefulness of her apt pen of how she clung to her heavenly lover—Christ—and saw in Him the complete fulfillment of all that she hoped for.

"Given in marriage unto thee,

Oh, thou celestial host!

Bride of the Father and the Son,

Bride of the Holy Ghost!

Other betrothal shall dissolve,

Wedlock of will decay;

Only the keeper of this seal

Conquers mortality." 25

Like the Apostle Paul, Emily's philosophical foundation for her ardent faith came from viewing the wonders of God's works that surrounded her. From the beauties of her Amherst residence and the surrounding Berkshires she received the "bulletins all day from Immortality". From these she reaffirmed her faith in the Divine Master who St. Paul said could not be denied if one did but observe His works.

25 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Pg. 228

"The only news I know
 Is bulletins all day
 From Immortality.
 The only shows I see
 Tomorrow and To-day,
 Perchance Eternity.

The only One I meet
 Is God,—the only street
 Existence, this traversed.

If other news there be,
 Or admirabler show—

I'll tell it you." 26

The first three lines of this beautiful credo were written in the summer of 1864 in response to Colonel Higginson's letter telling her of his ill health. Emily's own health was on the decline at this particular time, and the lines infer that she was not allowed to keep up a steady correspondence as was her custom. Later she incorporated these lines into the longer poem.

Another striking illustration of her belief in the Divine Existence from things created is found in the following two stanzas:

26 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 115. Withheld from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Lette Hampson.

"The rainbow never tells me
 That gust and storm are by;
 Yet is she more convincing
 Than philosophy.
 My flowers turn from forums
 Yet eloquent declare
 What Cato couldn't prove to me
 Except the birds were here!" 27

Perhaps the most frequently anthologized credo of Miss Emily Dickinson is the eight-line stanza "I Never Saw A Moor". Here again her absolute, unqualified belief in her Creator is remarkably demonstrated. The whole tenor of these and many other poems seems to be her affirmation of the wonders of Immortality, not through Philosophies, but with St. Paul, by an appreciation of the created things that surround us in God's universe.

Emily Dickinson wrote many poems, also, on the passing of her loved ones to Immortality. This was not a ghoul-like curiosity in which she tried to imagine what was taking place in the transition of the soul. All of these poems show the same spark of faith she kept burning, transmitted in hope to those who were now about to face their Maker.

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That God and earth are by;
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in hope to those who were not about to face their Maker.

Below is a typical example of her glowing faith shining through the pallid shades that came to the Dickinson mansion on the death of a loved one.

"The bustle in a house
The morning after death
Is solemnest of industries
Enacted upon earth,—
The sweeping up the heart,
And putting love away
We shall not want to use again
Until eternity." 28

Emily did not claim to know all the answers to the riddles of the universe. She was content to discover all that she could from the observation of her fellow men and from God's little creatures that were so abundantly found in her gardens. For the rest—those imponderable problems of metaphysics—she simply said the Artist that made her must be the only One who could tell.

The one premise in her Philosophy was the surety of a life to come. What was the basis of this belief? The following lines should serve to satisfy the most ardent prober of Emily's faith.

Tranquilly is also for her a "certificate of immortality".

28 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Pg. 192

Once more "Do people moulder equally
Faith, she says "They bury in the grave?"

I do believe a species

As positively live —

As I, who testify it,

Deny that I am dead

Emily held that to lose one's faith was to lose
of any mere material possession. They must be sacrificed
while the loss of faith could not.

In summing up "I say to you," said Jesus
Creator who reward "That there be standing here
listened to His "A Sort that shall not taste of death."
consuming one.

If Jesus was sincere

I need no further argue.

The statement of the Lord

Is not a controvertible.

He told me death was dead." 29

Thus Emily Dickinson tells us the real underlying
reason of her steadfast faith in Immortality. It is simply
because Christ has said so. That is sufficient grounds
for her wholehearted acceptance.

That others have lived noble lives and have died
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29 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 207
Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham

Once more with St. Paul, the champion of Christian Faith, she says concerning Christ's Resurrection:

"What duplicate exist --
What parallel can be--
Of the stupendousness of this
To universe and me?" 30

Emily held that to lose one's faith surpassed the loss of any mere material possession. They might be replenished while the loss of faith could not.

In summing up Emily Dickinson's belief in an omnipotent Creator Who rewards His creatures with immortality if they listened to His "bulletins" was an ardent, virile, and all-consuming one.

30 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 111. Withheld from Publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Lette Hampson.

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INTRODUCTION

To the student of Miss Emily Dickinson it becomes more and more apparent with each reading of her poetry that there was a poet who must have reached a remarkable degree of spirituality in her earthly existence. She not only shows a deep love and appreciation for the wonders of our universe in her verses but also reflects a soul that penetrated to a clear understanding of the supernatural relationship between the soul and its Creator.

Therefore it is appropriate to examine Miss Emily Dickinson on these points of asceticism and mysticism, her resignation, her humility, her detachment, her renunciation, and her prayer.

PART TWO

HER ASCETICISM

Martha Dickinson Bianchi gives us this clue: "Before one thinks of her as a poet and philosopher or mystic, one must remember her as an adoring and devoted daughter, a sister loyal to blows, a real nun of the home, without affectation or ritual beyond that of her gentle daily task, and all that she could devise of loving addition to the simple run. To one who loved her it is unthinkable that she could ever be supposed to have consciously asserted herself, or self-consciously indulged in whim or extravagance in living, which her fine breeding would have been the first to discard as vulgar and unworthy. It was her absorption

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in her world that made her unaware often of the more visible world of those that never see beyond it." 31

To bring out Miss Emily Dickinson's remarkable degree of spirituality, it might be well to draw a few comparisons between her and some of America's outstanding religious poets of other periods.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow reached the poetic scene shortly before Emily Dickinson. He published his first volume of verse Outre-Mer just three years after Emily's birth in Amherst in 1830.

Unlike Emily, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was more a product of his times. He was a poet who could capture the feelings of the people with his moralizing verse. He was always immensely popular and never crossed his adoring public by suggesting any inward struggle in his life. He never probed in his poetry any of the deeper theological issues with which Emily Dickinson sought to satisfy her soul. In a word he could be characterized, in comparison with Emily, as being more devout than religious.

On the other hand, the singer of Amherst sought no public acclaim of her verses and received none in return. She struggled with the crosses that were hers to bear and sought to reconcile the great problem of evil with the

31 The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson, Pg. 4
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On the other hand, the singer of Amherst sought no public acclaim of her verses and received none in return. She struggled with the crosses that were hers to bear and sought to reconcile the great problem of evil with the

Divine personality Who had placed her in "Eden" and given her such a dominating thirst for immortality.

Longfellow's primary purpose was to instruct and to lead his readers. Emily Dickinson sought first a deeper understanding of life's mysteries primarily, although she always reflected an intense love for the spiritual welfare of her neighbor, also.

The contrast might be brought out more forcibly perhaps if one read first Longfellow's "A Psalm of Life" and then turned to Miss Dickinson's verse:

"I reason, earth is short,

And anguish absolute.

And many hurt;

But what of that?

I reason, we could die:

The best vitality

Cannot excel decay;

But what of that?

I reason, that in heaven

Somehow, it will be even,

Some new equation given;

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The above example is intended only to show the difference in spiritual point of view between the two poets. One was primarily concerned with a guide to present problems of everyday life; the other was concerned with the answer to the eternal problem of the life hereafter.

Another contrast that might be made is that between Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Whitman's life span included that of Emily Dickinson's. Although he was still not fully appreciated in his own day but admired and read only by a comparatively devoted few, Walt Whitman sang a new verse with many new ideas. However, none of these novel, pantheistic notions set down in his free verse form ever approach the depth of true religious expression that is contained in the Dickinson stanzas. An illustration of this may be seen in one of Whitman's credos:

"I hear it was charged against me that I sought
to destroy institutions,

But really I am neither for or against institutions,
(What indeed have I in common with them? or what
with the destruction of them?)

Only I will establish in the Mannahatta and in
every city of these States inland and seaboard,
And in the fields and woods, and above every keel
little or large that dents the water

33 Modern American Poetry. Author, Louis Untereher.
28-43. "I Hear It Was Charged Against Me"
34 Ibid., Page 44. "Song of Myself"
35 Ibid., Page 92. "Truth Is As Old As God"

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and in the fields and woods, and above every keel

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Without edifices or rules or trustees or any
argument,

The institution of the dear love of comrades." 33

Walt Whitman generally glorified himself, thinking that
in doing so he was glorifying everybody. His world of
thought was anthropocentric.

"I celebrate myself, and sing myself,

And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs
to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,

I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear
of summer grass....." 34

Emily Dickinson sought only to discover the bond that
linked her to her Divine Creator and all her phrases and
praises were directed towards Him. Her world was Theocentric.

"Truth is as old as God,

His twin identity—

And will endure as long as He,

A co-eternity,

And perish on the day

That He is borne away

From mansion of the universe,

A lifeless Deity." 35

33 Modern American Poetry. Author, Louis Untermeyer.
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34 Ibid., Page 44, "Song of myself"
35 Ibid., Page 38, "Truth is as old as God"

She has been called the "feminine Walt Whitman", yet there hardly seems room for comparison here unless it is purely on the grounds of their endless imaginative scope. In their poetic style they differ as the night and day. In their approach to the eternal problems of life they stand on no common ground.

A more recent parallel in poetic religious thought could be drawn between Thomas Sterns Eliot and Miss Dickinson.

After The Wasteland Eliot turned to faith and showed in his later poems, Ash Wednesday, The Rock, and Murder in the Cathedral, a more definite acceptance of the Christian belief. Eliot leans, however, more towards the philosophical interpretation of life as his chief goal in writing poetry. With his gigantic lore of literary allusion he seeks to unite all segments of life into their proper philosophical pattern.

"Would it have been worth while,

To have bitten off the matter with a smile,

To have squeezed the universe into a ball

To roll it toward some overwhelming question,

To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,

Come back to tell you all, I shall tell

you all'—....." 36

On the other hand, Emily Dickinson repudiated on more than one occasion, as has already been shown in this paper,

36 Ibid., Page 427. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

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the search for the answers to life's problems through an appeal to a formal philosophy. Rather, she, in her verse as in her life, clung to a simple belief of the Christian code because she had learned the main tenets of that religion in her childhood and had never rejected a firm belief in Christ's words, although she differed with her father's church in her method of worshipping the Supreme Being.

Another point of contrast between Thomas Sterns Eliot and Miss Dickinson is the rather obvious one, of course, that the former is more English than American in his writings, while the latter, although appealing to all in the universal language of true poetry, did write more from the American scene.

An example of this is shown in the symbolistic overtones of Eliot's "The Hollow Men".

"Mistah Kurtz—he dead.

A penny for the Old Guy" 37
or in the same poem, the chorus verse,

"Here we go round the prickly pear

Prickly pear prickly pear

Here we go round the prickly pear

At five o'clock in the morning." 38

Emily Dickinson has often been compared with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Transcendentalism. Her notable critic George

37 Ibid., Page 435

38 Ibid., Page 436

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His exhaustive research into the background of the Amherst poet revealed little direct evidence of Emily's personal regard for Emerson, the poet. Professor Whicher points out, nevertheless, how Emily's mind must have come into direct contact with Emerson's through his lectures in Amherst and his visits to the Dickinsons.

Professor Whicher also makes a very important distinction in comparing Emily Dickinson's thought with that of the mental giant, Emerson. He declares:

"Echoes of Emersonian ideas, if one chooses to call them that, may be detected in Emily Dickinson's poems as easily as in Whitman's, but it is not profitable to single them out. The implication that Emerson created a point of view which other writers adopted is simply untrue. The resemblances that may be noted in Emerson, Parker, Thoreau, Emily Dickinson and several other New England authors were due to the fact that all were responsive to the spirit of the time. Their work was in various ways a fulfillment of the finer energies of a Puritanism that was discarding the husks of dogma. If we now think of Emerson as the center and soul of the transcendental movement,

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it is not because he invented Transcendentalism, but because in his writings the new philosophy reached a consummate fruition and received its widest applications." 39

Both poets were akin in their desire for integrity. Their aphoristic lines also show a kinship of expression to some degree. Like Sidney Lanier, also, they strove to explore the root-sources of man's spiritual powers.

Mystery still clouds the reason why Emily Dickinson gave up her lover and led a life of self-obliteration as far as romantic love was concerned. It seems safe to assume, however, that there was some obstacle which could not be overcome except by a decision which Emily could not in conscience make.

All that was ever told of the affair was Emily's confidence to her "sister Sue", who guarded the secret through a lifetime. So it is doubtful if the facts surrounding Emily's love life will ever be known. But the principal fact of her renunciation still stands.

Those close to Emily, including her niece, Martha Follen, interpreted the giving up of her lover by

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CHAPTER I

Her Renunciation

"Art thou the thing I wanted?

Begone! My tooth has grown!

Affront a minor palate

That has not starved so long!

I tell thee while I famished

The mystery of food

Increased till I abjured it,

Subsisting since like God." 40

Mystery still clouds the reason why Emily Dickinson gave up her lover and led a life of self-abnegation as far as romantic love was concerned. It seems safe to assume, however, that there was some obstacle which could not be overcome except by a decision which Emily could not in conscience make.

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Those close to Emily, including her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, interpret the giving up of her lover by

40 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 118
Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

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Emily as emanating from a high sense of moral obligation, and the necessity of keeping another woman's love untainted.

This would seem the logical answer. Emily Dickinson knew parental regimen. It is true she respected her father's wishes, but she possessed a will of her own regarding her own life's pursuits. This is evident from her early refusal to attend Divine services with her family since she chose to worship God in her own manner at home.

Nor was she obligated to aid her family financially. There was no burden in this regard in the Dickinson family, which enjoyed a comfortable prosperity.

The obstacle then must have lain in the love relationship itself, and more especially with Emily's lover himself.

Since Miss Josephine Pollitt,⁴¹ Miss Genevieve Taggard⁴² and Martha Dickinson Bianchi⁴³ have, in their biographies, hinted at different possibilities as to the rejected person in this love story, the picture has indeed become muddled. Some bitterness has also crept in since one of the possibilities suggested by Miss Pollitt was Major Hunt, the husband of one of Emily's best friends, Helen Hunt Jackson. This theory was taken as an affront by those who were in charge of Emily's writings, and further research along those lines has not been fruitful.

⁴¹ Emily Dickinson - The Human Background of her Poetry
Pg. 120-156 Author, Josephine Pollitt

⁴² Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 119-159.
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⁴³ Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 46-49
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- 41 Emily Dickinson - The Human Background of her Poetry Pg. 120-121 Author, Josephine Pollett
- 42 Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 119-120.
- 43 Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 42-43 Author, Genevieve Legend
- 44 Author, Martha Dickinson Bianchi

This conflict in the attempt to ferret out just who Emily's rejected lover was has tended to throw more and more shadows around the mystery which is most likely assuming too big a role already in the study of Miss Emily Dickinson.

Another reason why the mystery deepened and indeed why it became a mystery at all was the fact of Emily's secretive existence in the Dickinson mansion after giving up her beloved. This seclusion by the Amherst poet is aptly explained, I believe, by Martha Dickinson Bianchi's words of the preface to Further Poems of Emily Dickinson.

She writes: "She was never wantonly a recluse, nor did she know she was one.....The world Emily was running away from was not the world of now. It was a small country village 'drifted deep in Parian' all the slow winter long, a small country village all the dusty summer through—with its births and deaths, spites, ministerial taking sides, early tea parties, religious revivals in season, or the panic of unexpected relatives driving for uninvited visits. All of which became empty or arduous beside that inner society peopled by the Brownings, 'Immortality', 'Eternity', the Brontës and all the rest of her intimates." 44

44 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Preface, Pg. XIV. Withheld from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Lette Hampson.

This conflict in the attempt to ferret out just who Emily's rejected lover was has tended to throw more and more shadows around the mystery which is most likely surrounding her. A clue already in the story of Emily Dickinson. Another reason why the mystery remained and indeed why it became a mystery at all was the fact of Emily's sensitive existence in the Dickinson mansion after giving up her beloved. This resolution of the answer post is Emily explained, I believe, by her own Dickinson's words of the poem to further focus of Emily Dickinson. She writes: "She was never wanting a partner, nor did she know she was one.....The world Emily was running away from was not the world of her. It was a small country village, 'situated here in Fenton', all the slow winter long, a small country village all the dusty summer through--with its dunes and dunes, solaces, ministerial taking place, early tea parties, religious revivals in season, or the panic of unexpected relatives arriving for uninvited visits. All of which became empty or awkward beside that inner society presided by the Brownings, 'lamb'-Emily', 'Elizabeth', the Crocuses and all the rest of her intimates." 44

44 Further focus of Emily Dickinson. Preface, Ex. XIV. Although this was given by her sister Lavinia. Ex. by her sister Lavinia Dickinson and Alfred Lavinia Dickinson.

To anyone acquainted with the social life of a small New England town of our own time and even more so in Emily's, mere conjecture is sufficient to picture how the accounts grew from mouth to mouth about the lady in the house on Dickinson Street who never left the yard and who wrote poems on scraps of paper and sent them to her neighbors with gifts of flowers or cooking. It is not unlikely that many of the rumors regarding her romance have their foundation in nothing more than grotesque gossip.

Emily herself had this to say regarding self-denial in a letter to a friend: "To do a magnanimous thing and take oneself by surprise, if one is not in the habit of it, is precisely the finest of joys. Not to do a magnanimous thing, notwithstanding it costs us existence, is rapture herself spurned."

Emily has many more beautiful things to say about the renunciation of this world's goods. After her great disappointment she came more and more to learn the spiritual rule of looking upon all things of this life on earth as transitory and not containing the essence of everlasting joy.

The following poem sums up her thoughts. As usual the lines are explicitly intense and concentrated, but at the same time they are extremely articulate.

"I had been hungry all the years;

My noon had come, to dine;

To anyone acquainted with the social life of a small New England town of our own time and even more so in Emily's were conjecture is sufficient to picture how the accounts grew from month to month about the lady in the house on Blackinton Street who never left the yard and who wrote poems on scraps of paper and sent them to her neighbors with gifts of flowers or cooking. It is not unlikely that many of the rumors regarding her romance have their foundation in nothing more than grotesque gossip.

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My noon had come, to dine;

CHAPTER II

I, trembling, drew the table near,
 And touched the curious wine.

'Twas this on tables I had seen,
 When turning, hungry, lone,
 I looked in windows, for the wealth
 I could not hope to own.

I did not know the ample bread,
 'Twas so unlike the crumb

The birds and I had often shared,
 In Nature's dining room.

The plenty hurt me, 'twas so new,—
 Myself felt ill and odd,
 As berry of a mountain bush
 Transplanted to the road.

Nor was I hungry; so I found
 That hunger was a way

Of persons outside windows
 The entering takes away." 45

45 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 42. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

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 and touched the curious wine.
 'Twas this on tables I had seen,
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 I did not know the apple bread,
 'Twas so unlike the crumb
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 Myself felt ill and odd,
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 Not was I hungry; so I found
 That hunger was a way
 Of persons outside windows
 The entering takes away."

CHAPTER II

Her Detachment

Concomitant with the practice of renunciation was the rule of detachment that Emily practiced so much in her later years and which is so predominant in her verses.

This detachment was of course both of a physical and mental kind. It is well-known how Emily retired to the Dickinson home in Amherst after the Philadelphia trip on which she met her lover. When the affair was ended unhappily, Emily simply avoided all social contact, realizing that she had lost the love of her life and knowing that she could not find any peace in the inanities of the afternoon tea and bridge societies of the Amherst of her day. Instead of choosing, like J. Alfred Prufrock to measure out her life "with coffee spoons", Emily turned to the world of her books and her flower garden, protected from the curious by a beautiful cedar hedge. It was here that she spent most of her waking hours when she was not helping with the household tasks. When one of the family friends arrived, as they so frequently did, Emily often withdrew as unobtrusively as possible to her room in the southwest corner bedroom on the second floor of the old brick house.

As the years sped by, Emily sought the quiet of this retreat more often when the doorbell announced the presence of a guest or stranger. If she were in the front of the

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As the years sped by, Emily sought the quiet of this retreat more often when the doorbell announced the presence of a guest or stranger. If she were in the front of the

house, she withdrew to the kitchen where a back passageway led conveniently and directly to her room.

This then was the physical aspect of her detachment from the social world. But Emily Dickinson really lived in a world all of her own all of the time. It was a beautiful world created by her robust imaginative powers. It contained so many colorful figures and rhythms that even if Emily had moved more in contact with her Amherst friends, she still would not have been seeing and talking of the same things they saw and spoke about.

But Emily was not alone.

"The Soul that has a Guest,

Doth seldom go abroad,

Diviner Crowd at home

Obliterate the need,

And courtesy forbid

A Host's departure, when

Upon Himself be visiting

The Emperor of Men!" 46

Herein lies the real secret of her reticence. She was content to be alone because she always felt the Divine Presence and could meditate on the wonders of his creation and wrapped them in imaginative garb.

46 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Pg. 257

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But Emily was not alone.

"The Soul that has a Guest,

Is seldom so abroad,

Whispered words at home

Constitute the need,

And courtesy forbids

A host's departure, when

Upon himself he visits

The presence of his self."

Herein lies the real secret of her reticence. She was

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As the Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Pp. 237

Emily lets us in on a clue to finding this peace on earth with the following advice:

"Embarrassment of one another
And God
Is revelation's caution.
Aloud
Is nothing that is chief,
But still.
Divinity dwells under seal." 47

So the poet of Amherst was content to walk in the garden with only her dog Carlo at her side as she watched a bumble bee buzz from clover to clover. The stars were also some of her best acquaintances because their celestial call required no answer from her.

She describes often this inner life of the mind in her usual economic but concentrated way.

"To own the art within the soul,
The soul to entertain
With silence as a company
And festival maintain

In an unfurnished circumstance,
Possession is to one

Emily lets us in on a clue to finding this passage on

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usual economic but concentrated way.

"To own the art within the soul,

The soul to entertain

With silence as a company

And festival maintain

In an untroubled circumstance,

Possession is to one

As an estate perpetual
Or a reduceless mine." 48

This latter comparison of the richness of the inner life to an inexhaustive font of precious metals is a frequent metaphor of the poet when she is speaking of detachment from society.

Another poetic description of her inner world of the imagination is found in the following:

"I dwell in Possibility

A fairer house than Prose,
More numerous of windows,
Superior of doors.

Of chambers, as the cedars—

Impregnable of eye;

And for an everlasting roof

The gables of the sky.

Of visitors—the fairest—

For occupation—this—

The spreading wide my narrow hands

To gather Paradise." 49

48 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 292
Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

49 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 30. Withheld
from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece
Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Lette Hampson.

As an estate perpetual

Or a resourceless mine." 48

This latter comparison of the richness of the inner life to an inexhaustive font of precious metals is a frequent metaphor of the poet when she is speaking of detachment from society.

Another poetic description of her inner world of the

imagination is found in the following:

"I dwell in Possibility

A fairer house than prose,

More numerous of windows,

Superior of doors.

Of chambers, as the cedars—

Impregnable of eye;

And for an everlasting roof

The gables of the sky.

Of visitors—the fairest—

For occupation—this—

The spreading wide my narrow hands

To gather Paradise." 49

48 Salts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. P. 292. Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

49 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. P. 30. Withheld from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Bates Hanson.

Even though Emily Dickinson lived apart from human society during almost the entirety of her adult life, she nevertheless understood the human heart, its triumphs and its failures, as well as the physician knows his patient or the pastor one of the members of his flock.

Where did she get this knowledge? She wrote to her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert Dickinson (whom she always called "Sister Sue"), that Shakespeare had told her more knowledge than anyone living.

More especially liked among the plays was Othello, whose plot and richly human appeal sent Emily back again and again to thumb its pages. Macbeth and King Lear were two other favorites from the immortal bard.

Emily wrote to her old friend Colonel T. W. Higginson late in 1875 a truly remarkable tribute to the Elizabethan giant. She said: "While Shakespeare remains, literature is firm."

The Brontës were read early and remained as life-long intimates. The others who were Emily's teachers included George Eliot, Longfellow, Tennyson, the Brownings, Socrates, Plato, Poe, The Bible, Keats, Holmes, Hawthorne, J. R. Lowell, Dickens, and Ik Marvel.

With the company of these great souls Emily Dickinson felt no loss of companionship. She lived often in the world of their creation and learned to know their characters almost

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With the company of these great souls Emily Dickinson felt no loss of companionship. She lived often in the world of their creation and learned to know their characters almost

as real people. To them she would add the richness of her own imagery.

Finally radiating even through her innermost thoughts there was always the idea that the omniscience and omnipresence of the Supreme Being. Emily Dickinson had an intense intuition of personal responsibility, a religious characteristic that is so plainly missing so often in so many poets.

It is simply and vividly exhibited in the following eight lines:

"Of consciousness, her awful mate,

The soul cannot be rid;

As easy the secreting her

Behind the eyes of God.

The deepest hid is sighted first,

And scant to Him the crowd;

What triple lenses burn upon

The escapade from God!" 50

50 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 292
Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Intro.
Pg. xlii. Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

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It is simply and vividly exhibited in the following slight lines:

"Of consciousness, her swift mate,
The soul cannot be rid;
As easy the secret her
Behind the eyes of God.

The deepest hid is slighted first,
And scant to him the crowd;
That triple lenses turn upon
The aspects from God!" 50

CHAPTER III

Her Humility

It may seem natural to many that Emily Dickinson must have been a creature of humbleness since she lived such a lonely existence. Since she shunned any contact with society, it might seem that she was content to lead a very humble life.

However, pride seems to be a defect of human personality that is ever present and something against which a continuous warfare must be waged if one would become truly religious. For Emily it was not too difficult to be modest in her desire of this world's goods. She was content to live in her father's house. She had the essentials of life in sufficient amount. How could Satan reach her pride? It could only be through the medium to which she devoted almost her entire life.

Millicent Todd Bingham, co-editor along with her mother, Mabel Loomis Todd, of Bolts of Melody,⁵¹ points out in the introduction of that volume how Emily's apparent concern over fame asserted itself in some fifteen of the later poems that had been given to her mother and were just discovered to the wonderment of the literary world late in October of 1944.

Among the fifteen poems the author quotes in the preface is the following:

⁵¹ Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Intro. Pg. XXIV. Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

"Fame of myself to justify!
 All other plaudit be
 Superfluous, an incense
 Beyond necessity.
 Fame of myself to lack, although
 My name be else supreme,
 This were an honor honorless,
 A futile diadem." 52

Mrs. Bingham uses this poem to illustrate the idea that Emily was conscious that she deserved fame and had to keep continually reminding herself of its mortality and also that her own approval was more important anyway.

Yet one can hardly say this was any inordinate yearning for the greatness that would come with the recognition of her poetry.

The remainder of the fifteen selected poems deal more with the idea of the fickleness of fame such as the following:

"Above oblivion's tide there is a pier,
 And an effaceless "few" are lifted there,
 Nay, lift themselves; fame has no arms,
 And but one smile, inlaid with balms." 53

52 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 237
 Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham. 238.

53 Ibid., Page 307

"Pam of myself to justify!

All other should be

superfluous, an immense

beyond necessity.

Pam of myself to lack, although

My name be also supreme,

This were an honor noblesse.

A little of Adam." 52

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The remainder of the fifteen selected poems deal more

with the idea of the fickleness of fame such as the

following:

"Above oblivion's tide there is a pier,

and an elusiveness 'twixt the lifted there,

hey, lift themselves; fame has no arms.

And but one smile, inlaid with palms." 53

52 Poets of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 52V

53. by Wanda Loomis Todd and William Todd Bingham.

53 Poets, Page 53V

Because out of six hundred odd poems, in the newly discovered verses, some fifteen reveal Emily's thoughts on the subject of the elusiveness of fame does not necessarily mean the poet was prepossessed or obsessed with the thought of it as has been suggested. The several hundred other earlier poems show an even lesser interest in this theme.

Emily Dickinson refused to publish her poems. She had sought criticism of Colonel Higginson regarding her verses. On April 16, 1862 she opened her letter to him with these lines: "Mr. Higginson,—Are you too deeply occupied to say if my verse is alive?" 54

Subsequent letters reveal that Emily's new verse style was not received with any great enthusiasm but rather with suggestions to rearrange the lines to conform more with accepted verse patterns.

For example the following letter also written to Colonel T. W. Higginson: "Thank you for the surgery; it was not so painful as I supposed. I bring you others, as you ask, though they might not differ." 55

Emily Dickinson must have realized that her verses would not "live" in her own time. Yet, too, she must have had some inkling of the possibility that posterity might discover the wealth of her genius. Perhaps this is why

54 The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 238.
Author Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

55 Ibid., Page 238

she did not order them destroyed but merely withheld from publication.

Yet Emily Dickinson could hardly be called anything but humble throughout her life and writings. She accepted any criticisms offered by those few friends that had a chance to see her work and was satisfied in knowing that her poetry was true poetry and therefore "like ancestor's brocades can stand alone".

Emily offers a reason in verse why she did not seek publication of her poetry.

"Publication is the auction

Of the mind of man,

Poverty be justifying

For so foul a thing.

Possibly,—but we would rather

From our garret go

White unto the White Creator,

Than invest our snow.

Thought belongs to Him who gave it—

Then to him who bear

Its corporeal illustration. Sell

The Royal air

In the parcel. Be the merchant

Of the Heavenly Grace,

But reduce no human spirit
To disgrace of price!" 56

The "Amherst nun" had many other beautiful expressions of her humbleness which stemmed from her deeply religious nature.

False pride in others, especially if it happened to be a minister who was taking himself too seriously, always brought a barbed reminder in one of her scintillating verses.

For example we can imagine how Emily might have just returned from a boring harangue at church by an overbearing preacher, when she wrote the following:

"He preached upon "breadth" till it argued him narrow,-
The broad are too broad to define;
And of "truth" until it proclaimed him a liar,—
The truth never flaunted a sign.

Simplicity fled from his counterfeit presence
As gold the pyrites would shun.

What confusion would cover the innocent Jesus
To meet so enabled a man!" 57

56 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 4. Withheld from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Lette Hampson.

57 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 36. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

The secret of her happy, humble existence may be found in the following advice to those who take themselves too seriously. She cautions:-

"A Little madness in the Spring
Is wholesome even for the King,
But God be with the Clown,
Who ponders this tremendous scene—
This whole experiment of green,
As if it were his own!" 58

Emily gave up her life early in her career, when she chose not to accept her lover. She resigned herself to the will of her Divine Creator. "The parting with the rest", or those anxieties of life which all of us cling to, held no grip upon the soul of Emily Dickinson.

It is true that she often talked of death and was even more absorbed in the contemplation of it than most poets. But it was never a morbid or depressing concern. She felt that she had lived a life of truth by the dictates of her conscience and was looking to her promised reward—everlasting life. Since the grave was the portal through which she must pass, she often considered it poetically.

58 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 270. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Pg. 177

CHAPTER IV

Her Resignation

"When one has given up one's life

The parting with the rest

Feels easy, as when day lets go

Entirely the west;

The peaks that lingered last

Remain in her regret

As scarcely as the iodine

Upon the cataract." 59

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59 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 177 Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

So it was that her whole life was one of actual resignation waiting for the "digitus Dei" to beckon her. At times she grew restless, but for the most part it was a long period of patient waiting in her "Eden" while she glorified her Maker with her prayerful poetry.

Of the minor crosses that were hers to bear, the deaths of her loved ones seemed to cause her the most grief. Yet in about every instance of her poetical obituary notices there is a calmness that deep spirituality brings to a soul in that hour of distress.

For example, she wrote the following shortly after her mother's death.

"A Death-Blow is a life-blow to some
Who, till they died, did not alive become;
Who, had they lived, had died, but when
They died, vitality begun." 60

Again regarding her own departure from this earth there was always complete resignation.

".....

'Tis sweet to know that stocks will stand
When we with daisies lie,
That commerce will continue,
And trades as briskly fly.

60 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 204. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

It makes the parting tranquil
 And keeps the soul serene,
 That gentlemen so sprightly
 Conduct the pleasing scene!" 61

As has already been shown, Emily Dickinson was resigned to the acceptance of Divine Providence regarding the course of her own life. She was also ready always to accept God's universe as it confronted her without any final why or wherefore demanded. She had inherited its richness and thanked God for it. She argued simply that

".....Saviour, crucify." 62
 If nature will not tell the tale
 Jehovah told to her,
 Can human nature not survive
 Without a listener?

Admonished by her buckled lips
 Let every babbler be.
 The only secret people keep
 Is Immortality." 62

So Emily "with but a crumb" was truly "sovereign of them all".

Sometimes she reflected on what might have been had the

61 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 216. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

62 Ibid., Page 57

course remained clear for her to marry her loved one. But it is most often with a spirit of resignation and understanding that Emily Dickinson came to know the main secret of successful life--sacrifice and suffering.

".....

Earth would have been too much, I see,
And heaven not enough for me;

I should have had the joy
Without the fear to justify,—
The palm without the Calvary;
So, Saviour, crucify." 63

Indeed, in form and substance, all the poems of Emily Dickinson are truly prayers. She has spoken of receiving "bulletins all day from immortality". Her replies, too, partake of the immortal.

Whether she was asking forgiveness of her Creator, or thanking Him for His blessings, or beseeching some special favor--she continually directed her thoughts toward God.

Some of them were more formal than others. They opened with "Dear God" or just "Saviour". They were always spoken from the heart and were conversational in tone.

63 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 29. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

CHAPTER V

Her Prayer

"At least to pray is left, is left.

O Jesus! in the air

I know not which thy chamber is,—

I'm knocking everywhere.

Thou stirrest earthquake in the South.

And maelstrom in the sea;

Say, Jesus Christ of Nazareth,

Hast thou no arm for me?" 64

Indeed, in sum and substance, all the poems of Emily Dickinson are truly prayers. She has spoken of receiving "bulletins all day from Immortality". Her replies, too, partake of the immortal.

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64 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 203. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

because Emily was on intimate terms with her Divine Master in all of her life.

On other occasions perhaps the poems were not ostensibly prayerful but they have about them the characteristic of a soul seeking communion with its Maker which is nothing more than the exercise of prayer itself.

Emily has written many beautiful lines concerning the nature of prayer. She was very much at home with this phase of the spiritual life, because she was particularly keen about examining the mental processes in all their maneuverings.

Prayer is like thought.

"Your thoughts don't have words every day,
They come a single time
Like signal esoteric sips
Of sacramental wine,
....." 65

Or,

"You love the Lord you cannot see,
You write Him every day
A little note when you awake
And further in the day

65 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 228.
Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

An ample letter—how you miss
 And would delight to see—
 But then, His house is but a step,
 And mine's in heaven, you see." 66

Another experience in prayer is simply and beautifully recorded in her stanzas. The following lines reveal the soul of the Amherst poet was ever striving towards perfection in the realm of the spiritual.

"I meant to have but modest needs,
 Such as content, and heaven;
 Within my income these could lie,
 And life and I keep even.

But since the last included both,
 It would suffice my prayer
 But just for one to stipulate,
 And grace would grant the pair." 67

Something of her later dissension in regard to formal church meetings can be seen in this youthful letter to her sister-in-law. It shows the great variability of her expression and how her soul ever fought against an environment of religious sterility. It soared like an eagle into

66 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 219. Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

67 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 23. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

a purer realm, where it might worship the Creator with its own rare powers.

"I have thought of you all day and I fear of but little else and when I was gone to Meeting you filled up my mind so full I couldn't find a chink to put the worthy pastor in, when he said 'Our Heavenly Father,' I said 'O darling Sue!' When he read the One Hundredth psalm I kept saying your precious letter over to myself, and Susie, when they sang it would have made you laugh to hear one little voice piping to the departed. I made up words and kept singing how I loved you—and you had gone away—while all the rest of the choir were singing the Hallelujah! I presume nobody heard me because I am so small, but it was a comfort to feel I might put them all out singing of you. I am not there though this afternoon, because I am here, writing this letter to you." 68

A full expression of one of her soul's secret communions in prayer with the Lord is found in this beautiful dialogue in verse. It reveals at once her intense desire to gain her eternal reward and also her ardent faith in the Redeemer.

"Unto Me?"

"I do not know you—

Where may be your house?"

68 The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 21.
Author Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

"I am Jesus—late of
Judea,
Now of Paradise."

"Wagons have you, to
Convey me?
This is far from thence"—

"Arms of mine sufficient
Phaeton,
Trust Omnipotence."

"I am spotted."

"I am Pardon."

"I am small."

"The least
Is esteemed in Heaven
The chiefest.
Occupy my house." 69

69 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 49. Withheld from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and Alfred Lette Hampson.

"I am Jesus--I am of

Heaven,

Now of Paradise."

"Angels have you, to

Convey me?

This is far from Heaven"--

"Arms of mine sufficient

Protest,

Trust Omnipotence."

"I am spotted."

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62 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 49. Withheld
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CHAPTER I

Yankee Smartness

It remains to discuss the poems of Emily Dickinson that contain her occasional impieties, skepticism, and irreverences. How may they be accounted for?

St. Theresa of Avila, the famous Spanish mystic, once complained to the Lord that the reason He had so few intimate friends was that He used them so roughly. Emily Dickinson's attitude on these occasions when she spoke sharply to Heaven was dictated by the same motive that prompted the Carmelite nun. Both were a little peeved that the Lord didn't make things a little easier on them when they were trying to do His Will.

PART THREE

DISCORDS

On other occasions Emily showed evidence of skepticism in regard to the accepted Christian doctrine concerning fundamental truths. These poems are a minority, of course, and even they show within themselves that her doubts were fleeting ones. Set over against the vast majority of other poems that show her lively faith in Jesus Christ and His teachings, they appear like a few scattered clouds in a sky that is otherwise azure-blue.

Her few so-called irreverences will, upon rereading, define themselves as Emily's attempt at humor, although in some cases it might also be stamped as "Yankee smartness".

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Typical of the poems that show a trace of skepticism is the following short poem:

"Which is best? Heaven,
Or only heaven to come,
With that old codicil of doubt?
I cannot help esteem
The 'bird within the hand'
Superior to the one
The 'bush' may yield me—or may not—
Too late to choose again." 70

The above selection shows the old intellectual conflict of the mind when it confronts itself with the thought of an after life. Emily Dickinson was more firm in her conviction of immortality than in any other tenet of the Christian code, and yet she was not averse to writing down her occasional misgivings on the subject.

The second stanza reveals once more her love for her "Eden"—her term for the earthly existence. This clinging to the "bush" is altogether understandable because, for Emily, it was always the best way of tracing her thoughts back to the Creator.

Most of these clouded moments in her poetic life hint at an impatience with God rather than any real disbelief.

70 Bolts of Melody. New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 276. Ed. by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham.

Witness the following outburst of soul—

"Of course I prayed—
 And did God care;
 He cared as much as
 On the air
 A bird had stamped her foot
 And cried 'Give me!'
 " 71

Rica Brenner says: "Emily Dickinson was not irreverent. She did discard her ancestral deity, it is true. But she worshipped her God, a tender, loving God, and she endowed Him with her own most precious possession,—a sense of humor." 72

It was this last-mentioned quality, her Yankee sense of humor, that has caused some readers embarrassment and the feeling that Emily was being irreverent. On the contrary, she was always respectful, but felt that she could speak frankly to Him because He was such an Old Friend of hers.

This characteristic may be seen in the following. One cannot help feeling the playfulness of the mood that runs behind it.

71 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 44. Withheld from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and Alfred Lette Hampson.

72 Twelve American Poets Before 1900. Pg. 292. Author Rica Brenner.

"I never felt at home below,
 And in the handsome skies
 I shall not feel at home
 I know,
 I don't like Paradise.
 Because it's Sunday all the time
 And recess never comes,
 And Eden'll be so lonesome
 Bright Wednesday afternoons.
 If God could make a visit,
 Or ever took a nap—
 So not to see us—but they say
 Himself a telescope
 Perennial beholds us,—
 Myself would run away
 From Him and Holy Ghost and All—
 But—there's the Judgment Day!" 73

Sometimes a metaphysical problem would plague the mind of Emily for an answer. Not forthcoming from her Bible readings or other sources, it would be provided by the poet in the turning of some Yankee-smart phrase or saying.

73 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 43. Withheld from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and Alfred Lette Hampson.

"I never left at home below,
 And in the handsome skies
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The following is an example;

"Heavenly Father," take to thee

The supreme iniquity,

Fashioned by thy candid hand

In a moment contraband.

Though to trust us seem to us

More respectful—"we are dust."

We apologize to Thee

For Thine own Duplicity." 74

The words of Martha Dickinson Bianchi are significant in summing up this chapter. "Emily was a universal creature, her mind always tuned for a dash to any pole, her raids on truth directed by her own premonitions,—a 'Fellow of the Royal Infinity' perhaps, like her own 'Pine Tree!'"

"Yet there have been critics, souls even, one rejoices not to say priests, disturbed by her irreverence. It has also been said that her letters and conversation were salted with the Bible and its characters with a spontaneous directness that would have delighted St. Francis of Assisi as much as it would have desolated Cotton Mather. But the religious naiveté of her environment must be suggested in extenuation,—the Calvinistic rigidity of precise definition so antagonistic to her intuition of the unknown.

"It is in this mood of exasperation that she asks:

74 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. 298. With an introduction by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

"We prate of Heaven,

We pray to Heaven,

Relate when neighbors die

At what O'Clock to Heaven they fled—

Who saw them wherefore fly?"

"If she appeared to take liberties with her own relation to her religious training it was probably because she often felt nearer of kin to her Father in Heaven than her New England father on earth. Her spirit approached the Unseen with more assurance in the range of the immaterial and boundless by some subtle bond that saved her from fear, until she was snatched back again by the force of instilled temerity." 75

Finally, in the words of George Frisbie Whicher: "The secret of her inimitable art, phrases sharp as crystal, stanzas vitalized by delicate metrical variation and hinted rhyme, is its integrity." 76

75 Further Poems of Emily Dickinson. Pg. VI, Withheld from publication by her sister Lavinia. Ed. by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and Alfred Lette Hampson.

76 Encyclopedia Americana. Vol. 9. Pg. 84. Article on Emily Dickinson.

CONCLUSION

Emily Dickinson's life and poetry still continue to be a lively topic for discussion in literary circles. Much that has been written about her concerns her seclusion. In fact, that has been the central theme of most of the books of criticism regarding her work. They have tried to speculate how her disappointment in love affected her poetry.

But the only possible way to explain the mind of Emily Dickinson and to evaluate her poetry is by indirectness,—through her own milieu, and her own impressions set down in her poems.

Other attempts to explain her by probing for the identity of her lost lover have tended to detract from a proper emphasis on her poetry, the medium through which she has gained a secure place in American literature.

From her poetry then we find the soul of a true Christian ascetic who lived a life of deep spirituality.

She was imbued with a great desire for the cardinal Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Love.

Moreover, her life was spent in pursuit of those finer achievements of the spiritual life,—resignation, humility, detachment, and renunciation.

Indeed she was one of America's outstanding religious poets, if we understand that word religion in its true sense as the bond that unites the Creator with the created. Emily

constantly sought to learn the nature of this tie and to fulfill the obligations inherent in it. She knew the struggle between the beauty of the sensible world and the moral law. She had an intense intuition of personal responsibility.

Longfellow was more devout than religious. Another contemporary, Whitman, was more anthropocentric and materialistic, while Emily's world was completely Theocentric. In our own time, T. S. Eliot, in contrast to Emily, is more philosophical in his writings than religious, and also more English than American.

Thus proudly we hail the mercurial genius of the Amherst poet who used her talents in worshipful thanksgiving to her Divine Creator.

Emily was exposed to the best in educational advantages, but she could not escape the sternness of the religious code and returned to pursue her studies on her own.

In 1825 in the fall she went to Washington and Philadelphia for a visit. Here she met and fell in love with a man whom she refused to marry. The exact circumstances of the affair remain unknown, but it is chiefly thought that marriage would have meant the ending of another woman's marital happiness.

She returned to Amherst and began her secret life.

ABSTRACT

In summarizing the achievement of Emily Dickinson as a religious poet, it is well to keep in mind the facts of her Amherst environment and her early youth.

The Amherst of her day was itself a secluded community in the Berkshires which was dominated socially and in its thinking by a strict Calvinistic code of life. Many of its youth were rigorously trained to carry on their teachings in the mission field.

Emily Dickinson was born into this milieu in a well-to-do family. Her father was an austere, uncommunicative type but he was a very efficient public servant. The poet's mother was an honest housewife whose intellectual capabilities were limited and whose interest was centered mostly on her household tasks.

Emily was exposed to the best in educational advantages, but she could not stand the sternness of the religious code and returned home to pursue her studies on her own.

In 1852 in the fall she went to Washington and Philadelphia for a visit. Here she met and fell in love with a man whom she refused to marry. The exact circumstances of the affair remain unknown, but it is chiefly thought that marriage would have meant the putting asunder of another woman's marital happiness.

She returned to Amherst and began her secretive existence

in the old Dickinson mansion. She began to write her brilliant little verses on scraps of paper and the back of envelopes in the moments when she was not helping with the housework.

These "Bolts of Melody" reveal a soul that was extremely engrossed in and dedicated to the task of loving and worshiping God in the best manner that she knew.

Her love for nature, animate and inanimate, for her fellow beings and for her Creator is as boundless as the unlimited scope of her imagination. She showed this love in her poems and also in whatever contact she had with others. Her great sacrifice was probably an act of loving kindness towards another.

The Christian virtue which Emily Dickinson developed and practiced most of all was that of hope and confidence in her Creator. Although she consistently referred to her earthly existence as living in "Eden", nevertheless, just as consistently does she look forward to the perfect fulfillment of her desires in the exciting world to come after death. A vast majority of her poems testify to this assertion.

Emily Dickinson's faith in an omnipotent God who had fashioned her out of clay and placed her in Eden and would one day call her to immortality was a lively, vigorous and steadfast belief. It was remarkably free from the coldness and sternness of her Calvinistic background in old Amherst.

It resembled more that of the militant faith of the Apostle Paul. She arrived at this faith through observation of the wonders of the created world.

The poet was also a true ascetic and mystic. She led the deeply spiritual life of a nun, with her own firm will and keen understanding as her spiritual guide.

Her entire adult life was one of renunciation. She left the world knowing that the man whom she loved she could not have. But it was not as the neurotic female whose life has been ruined by disappointment in love. Rather Emily chose to live out her days enjoying the wonders of the created universe in the solitude of her flower garden receiving "bulletins from Immortality" or in the quiet of her front room composing prayerful notes to and about God.

She detached herself from the Amherst social calendar of afternoon teas, bridge games, and commencements. She chose to spend her time quietly with her books and her writing, although her desire for this kind of life has been misunderstood by some.

Her poems on the inner life of the soul reach a high point in the depth of their understanding and the scintillating beauty of their expression.

She remained humble, although undoubtedly in the brilliance of her thought, she was aware that her poetry would live.

She accepted her fate with a wonderful resignation to the Maker's will, waiting patiently for her call to eternal life.

The author has tried to show throughout by a recourse to Emily Dickinson's poems themselves that she is a poet who is unsurpassed for the intense religious spirit that pervades her lines. Her world was Theocentric. In her concept of love she escaped the romantic virus. Her impatience with organized religion is not revolt against the Christian code but against aridity. She knew the struggle between the beauty of the material world and moral rectitude. She lived in the light of death and had an intense intuition of personal responsibility.

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